

# **Code of Conduct for the Election of the Director-General of the World Health Organization<sup>1</sup>**

In resolution WHA65.15 concerning the report of the Working Group of Member States on the Process and Methods of the Election of the Director-General of the World Health Organization, the World Health Assembly decided, inter alia, that “a code of conduct, in line with Recommendation 7 of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit ‘Selection and Conditions of Service of Executive Heads in the United Nations System Organizations’, which candidates for the post of Director-General of the World Health Organization and Member States should undertake to observe and respect, will be developed by the Secretariat for consideration by the Sixty-sixth World Health Assembly through the Executive Board.”

This code of conduct (the “code”) aims at promoting an open, fair, equitable and transparent process for the election of the Director-General of the World Health Organization. In seeking to improve the overall process, the code addresses several areas, including the submission of proposals, the conduct of electoral campaigns by Member States and candidates, as well as funding and financial matters.

The code is a political understanding reached by the Member States of the World Health Organization. It recommends desirable behaviour by Member States and candidates with regard to the election of the Director-General in order to increase the fairness, credibility, openness and transparency of the process and thus its legitimacy as well as the legitimacy and acceptance of its outcome. As such, the code is not legally binding but Member States and candidates are expected to honour its contents.

## **A. General requirements**

### **I. Basic principles**

The whole election process as well as electoral campaign activities related to it should be guided by the following principles that further the legitimacy of the process and of its result:

due regard to the principle of equitable geographical representation,  
fairness,  
equity,  
transparency,  
good faith,  
dignity, mutual respect and moderation,  
non-discrimination, and  
merit.

### **II. Authority of the Health Assembly and the Executive Board in accordance with their Rules of Procedure**

1. Member States accept the authority of the Health Assembly and the Executive Board to conduct the election of the Director-General in accordance with their Rules of Procedure and relevant resolutions and decisions.
2. Member States that propose persons for the post of Director-General have the right to promote those candidatures. The same applies to candidates with regard to their own candidature. In the exercise of that right, Member States and candidates should abide by all rules governing the election of the Director-General

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<sup>1</sup> The Code of Conduct was adopted through resolution WHA66.18 and amended through decision WHA73(27).

contained in the Constitution of the World Health Organization, the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly, and the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board as well as in relevant resolutions and decisions.

### **III. Responsibilities**

1. It is the responsibility of Member States and candidates for the post of Director-General of the World Health Organization to observe and respect this code.
2. Member States acknowledge that the process of election of the Director-General should be fair, open, transparent, equitable and based on the merits of the individual candidates. They should make this code publicly known and easily accessible.
3. The Secretariat will also promote awareness of the code in accordance with the provisions of the code.

## **B. Requirements for the different steps of the election process**

### **I. Submission of proposals**

When proposing the name of one or more persons for the post of Director-General, Member States should include in their proposal a statement to the effect that they and the persons proposed by them pledge to observe the provisions of the code. The Director-General will remind Member States accordingly when inviting Member States to propose persons for the post of Director-General in accordance with Rule 62 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board.

### **II. Electoral campaign**

1. This code applies to electoral campaign activities related to the election of the Director-General whenever they take place until the appointment by the Health Assembly.
2. All Member States and candidates should encourage and promote communication and cooperation among one another during the entire election process. Member States and candidates should act in good faith bearing in mind the shared objectives of promoting equity, openness, transparency and fairness throughout the election process.
3. All Member States and candidates should promptly disclose their campaign activities (for example, hosting of meetings, workshops and visits), together with the amount and source of all funding for campaign activities, and communicate them to the Secretariat. Information so disclosed will be posted on a dedicated page of the WHO website.
4. Member States and candidates should refer to one another with respect; no Member State or candidate should at any time disrupt or impede the campaign activities of other candidates. Nor should any Member State or any candidate make any oral or written statement or other representation that could be deemed slanderous or libellous.
5. Member States and candidates should refrain from improperly influencing the election process, by, for example, granting or accepting financial or other benefits as a quid pro quo for the support of a candidate, or by promising such benefits.
6. Member States and candidates should not make promises or commitments in favour of, or accept instructions from, any person or entity, public or private, and should avoid any other similar action, when that could undermine, or be perceived as undermining, the integrity of the election process.

7. Member States proposing persons for the post of Director-General should promptly disclose grants or aid funding to other Member States during the previous two years in order to ensure full transparency and mutual confidence among Member States.

8. Member States that have proposed persons for the post of Director-General should facilitate meetings between their candidate and other Member States, if so requested. Wherever possible, meetings between candidates and Member States should be arranged on the occasion of conferences or other events involving different Member States rather than through bilateral visits.

9. Travel by candidates to Member States to promote their candidature should be limited in order to avoid excessive expenditure that could lead to inequality among Member States and candidates. In this connection, Member States and candidates should consider using as much as possible existing mechanisms (sessions of the regional committees, Executive Board and Health Assembly) for meetings and other promotional activities linked to the electoral campaign.

10. Candidates, whether internal or external, should not combine their official travel with campaigning activities. Electoral promotion or propaganda under the guise of technical meetings or similar events should be avoided. It is understood, however, that candidates for the post of Director-General on official travel may participate in the web forum, the candidates' forums and in campaign activities on the margins of regional committee sessions.

11. After the Director-General has dispatched all proposals, curricula vitae and supporting information to Member States in accordance with Rule 62 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board, the Secretariat will open on the WHO website a password-protected forum for questions and answers, open to all Member States and candidates. Such a forum will not be held in the case of only one candidate being proposed. The Secretariat will also post on the WHO website information on all candidates including their curricula vitae and other particulars of their qualifications and experience as received from Member States within the deadline provided in the second paragraph of Rule 62 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board as well as their contact information. The website will also provide links to individual websites of candidates upon request. Each candidate is responsible for setting up and financing her or his own website.

12. The Secretariat will also post on WHO's website, at the time referred to in the first paragraph of Rule 62 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board, information on the election process and the applicable rules and decisions, as well as the text of this code.

### **III. Nomination and appointment**

1. The nomination and appointment of the Director-General is conducted by the Executive Board and the Health Assembly, respectively, in accordance with their Rules of Procedure and relevant resolutions and decisions. As a matter of principle in order to preserve the serenity of the proceedings, candidates should not attend those meetings even if they form part of the delegation of a Member State.

2. Member States should abide strictly by the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board and of the World Health Assembly and other applicable resolutions and decisions and respect the integrity, legitimacy and dignity of the proceedings. As such, they should avoid behaviours and actions, both inside and outside the conference room where the nomination and appointment take place, that could be perceived as aiming at influencing its outcome.

3. Member States should respect the confidentiality of the proceedings and the secrecy of the votes. In particular, they should refrain from communicating or broadcasting the proceedings during the private meetings through electronic devices.

4. In view of the secret nature of the vote for the nomination and appointment of the Director-General, Member States should refrain from publicly announcing in advance their intention to vote for a particular candidate.

#### **IV. Internal candidates**

1. WHO staff members, including the Director-General in office, who are proposed for the post of Director-General, are subject to the obligations contained in the WHO Constitution, Staff Regulations and Staff Rules as well as to the guidance that may be issued from time to time by the Director-General.

2. WHO staff members who are proposed for the post of Director-General must observe the highest standard of ethical conduct and strive to avoid any appearance of impropriety. WHO staff members must clearly separate their WHO functions from their candidacy and avoid any overlap, or perception of overlap, between campaign activities and their work for WHO. They also have to avoid any perception of conflict of interest.

3. WHO staff members are subject to the authority of the Director-General, in accordance with the applicable regulations and rules, in case of allegations of breach of their duties with regard to their campaign activities.

4. The Health Assembly or the Executive Board may call upon the Director-General to apply Staff Rule 650 concerning special leave to staff members who have been proposed for the post of Director-General.

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